

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Henry Kellerman
June 18, 1992
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PREFACE

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HENRY KELLERMAN

June 28, 1995

Q: Would you please state your name and your birth place for us.

A: My name is Henry Kellerman. I'm a Berliner. I'm a _____ no longer a German. I gave up my German citizenship when I left Germany, but I'll always be a Berliner. You can't shake that. I was born in Berlin in 1910 under the great reign of Casmir Wilhelm, II. We were a middle class family, and we went to all the stages and points of interest of a upper middle class family. My father was a rabbi in Berlin, which put us in the category of, I suppose, really local intellegents here. My mother came from AustraliA: My father was a Bavarian. So, if we ever wanted to talk about a mixed marriage, that will be it. My father was far more a philosopher than a theologian. He was a student and became a collaborator of Herman Korne, and was a member of the so called Marbrook School, a _____ school. He wrote extensively a number of books. The last one he couldn't finish because he died prematurely at the age of 53 in Berlin. We were in those days a typically Russian middle class family with all the necessary qualifications. We were brought up in the German classics. I remember my mother at the age of 86 could still quote _____, and all that she learned in high school. My father was totally devoted to German philosophy and on one the side and to the Jewish prophets on the other. His sermons I remember were always on a fairly high intellectual level, and as a child I understood very little of it and later I wondered how many else really grasped the meaning of the message he had to give. He had enormous power of intellect and overwhelming. I went to a public school, a gymnasium in Germany, in Berlin, where we were educated according to the very strict rules of German humanism. We learned enormously facts and figures. We learned five languages, starting of course with German, French, English, Greek, Latin. You name it, and naturally integral and French calculus. It was a very profound type of education, but it taught us very little about social values. Social criticism particularly in history was not permissible and we grew up without any defense-- intellectual defense at the time against the powers that were to take over later on in the 30s. I went for twelve years to the school and graduated in 1928. I then went to various universities at Berlin, Fribrook and Heidelberg, and eventually made my doctorate degree at the University of Berlin, doctorate of Juris Prudence. The years I spent in Berlin, Germany, as a child and as an adolescent were years which really laid the foundation for whatever later on became my professional calling. They were great years in many respects. The 20s in Berlin, an unforgettable experience. I remember that the summary referred to that the 20s in Berlin as a so called age of pericles in Berlin. What was offered in terms of art, culture, and literature was unbelievable, and the names I got to know in this days on the German stage and the German consulates, unforgettable, and I didn't forget them. Later on, I was fortunate enough to meet some of these prominent actors and when I came back to Germany after the war. I believe that this is something that is frequently overlooked, that in the 20s Berlin really seemed to be the cultural capital of Europe. With four operas, 36 legitimate stages, two great symphony orchestras, a university with high standards of excellence, and with a scientific community which

included Albert Einstein among others. It was paramount to nothing. What came afterwards in the 30s was a total collapse of all what we had seen, heard and learned in the 20s. I lived four years under Hitler, and I experienced on the first of April, 1933, the _____ day, I lived continued to stay. I continued to stay for a number of reasons. First of all I wasn't finished with Germany. It was my hope, which proved to be a total illusion, as it was with many other Germans and Jews, that that was a passing phase, and if we had the patience and the will to stay, we would see the end of the Hitler regime. That proved to be totally untrue. My second reason was that I had always been a member of the Jewish Youth Movement in Germany, and I had been in a leading position there, and when Hitler came and all the young people were thrown out of their German Youth Organizations --

Q: Which German Youth Organizations were you a member of?

A: I will come to that in a minute. We all banded together in one large organization which was called at the time the League of German Jewish Youth, and I became the National head of this organization. By our standards, which were not too large, but there was 10,000 plus with local chapters all over Germany, which I visited. We operated under increasing restrictions. There were prohibitions all along the road. We couldn't meet there, we couldn't meet there. The Gestapo people came to the private homes where we had our weekly or monthly sessions, and watched us kids discuss Jewish history and religion and took assiduously notes to the terror of the parents. But we were rather not phased by this. We put up with it. Then the restrictions became more acute and we had to limit our meetings and eventually the league was dissolved by the Gestapo. Before that, we created a camp, a little more than that, a settlement in Silizea (ph) where we were training members of our organization for amunication as farmers, as artisans, in other words, in non intellectual pursuits which we felt at that the time might open a new future for these youngsters. I stayed until 1937 and my third reason for staying was I still working on my doctorate dissertation at the University of Berlin. It became more and more precarious and the question, would I be able to make it to the final exam was very questionable. I had a professor at Berlin University who went to battle for me. After the Nuremberg laws were passed in 1935, he called me in and he said, you know it's very doubtful that you still will be able to pass your exam, but I trust that if there is any passions left in this administration, they may remember that they admitted you before and they will feel legally and duty bound to admit you. And he proved to be right. I was indeed permitted over the protest of the Dean of the University and probably some political authorities to take my doctorate exam in 1937 at the University of Berlin, and I passed it, and a month later I left for the United States. A few years ago, I remembered that 50 years had passed since my first doctorate examination and it occurred to me that I should find out whether the University of Berlin would grant me my so called Golden Doctorate diploma which comes 50 years after. But I was not willing really, to be honored that way by a University that was still under communist control, and I delayed my application until the war came down. After this, I went to my friend in the German Embassy and I said do you think it's practical for me to request that I be granted my

golden doctorate diploma, and he said that's a great idea: So, the road to Berlin, in fact last year here in October, I went to Berlin and was given the so called golden doctorate diploma by the university. I spoke to 600 law students to tell them a little bit what it was like to grow up in Germany in the 20s and in the 30s. These kids didn't have a clue. It was all completely new to them. The names I mentioned of the people gave distinctive reputation to German and specifically Berlin in the 20s. So, now I have my golden doctorate diploma: Now, I left Germany after as I said after my doctorate exam and came straight to the States. Due largely to the fact that I had met a marvelous man in one of our conferences in the offices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism in London, Montefiore and Lilly Montegue, and his name was Rabbi Lazerum, and he was the rabbi of the Baltimore Hebrew congregation. He would urge me long before to come to the United States, and finally sent me an affidavit which I needed to gain my entrance into the States. I went to Baltimore and I had a fellowship at John Hopkins University in Political Economics. Then later I went to New York and had a position with the National Refugee Service, where I led a division for social and cultural adjustment, and at the same time studied social work at the New York School of Social Work, and got my diploma: Then war broke out, and I decided I had to do something about it. I wasn't eligible immediately because I had three dependents and I was a little too old then. So, I decided to go to Washington to look for a position with any of the war agencies. I was rather lucky to find a position as analyst with which was called the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service. It was part of the Fellow Communications Committee. What we did was to monitor any rebroadcasts mostly and write analyses and send them on to the war department or State Department or the White House, where there was need for this kind of information. In fact, it included a lot of hard intelligence which was hard to develop. My immediate tutor, mentor, and boss was Doctor Hanzpier, one of the noted sociologists who was also from Berlin, who died recently. From Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service I switched over the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services and became a political analyst there. Then, when was nearing its end, and we began to focus on postwar targets, and the Nuremberg Trial was mentioned, I was given the job by OSS to draft the so called pretrial briefs against the Nazi party, the SS, the SA, the Hitler Youths, and I spent about a year trying to get this material together. It proved that we had an enormous amount of material, and yet some of the most important documents like the one document which stipulated the extermination of European Jews was not among them. We must have had it somewhere, but it was not made available at the time. But we had plenty of material when we went to Nuremberg. I was sent with a team, a research team, under the leadership of Franz Noriman, one of the other great political analysts who emigrated from Germany, and eventually took over his position of chief of research in Nuremberg where we continued to collect and present evidence for use by the prosecution. We were part of the American prosecution in Nuremberg. It was a fascinating experience and I've talked about it often and have written about it, and it was in retrospect I feel a very important and very useful experience. This has been contested by many people who have attacked the Nuremberg Trials as having been trial of the victors who were vanquished and trials based on expo facto law. I didn't see any of these views. I think the Nuremberg Trial was a monumental effort, first of all to punish some of

the main culprits who were sentenced to death or life long prison sentences. It's recorded for the world to see what the Nazi legacy had been, and it created new international law which was promulgated as such later on by the United Nations.

Q: Can you give us some specific cases that you worked on and some of the people that you worked with?

A: Well, we tried for one thing, Bill Donovan, who was the head of the OSS and my boss, and I worked together in Nuremberg and we tried to break down the testimony of Herman Goering, who was the prima dona of the trial. It was enormously difficult. Goering was a man of extreme intelligence. We gave him an i.Q: test, all the defendants, and Goering and _____, a former minister of finance and potentially for the war effort emerged in the genius category. There came the day when we presented the structure and the pogrom of the party to the bench. A young mayor, not so young, a mayor whose name shall not be mentioned, was given the task of presenting the evidence against Goering and the rest. The mayor was a man who had studied the record, but it hadn't sunk in, so I had to coach him for the job, and I presented him with a chart of the party, and he said when you introduce the party tomorrow will you please point out that Goering was the number one deputy of Hitler, and that Hess was number two and then follow up with the rest of hierarchy. He couldn't grasp it. I would say now repeat after me, Goering number one, Hess number two. And he would say all right, if the Court please the head deputy was Mr. Hess and Goering was number two. It went on and on. He couldn't get it straight until at midnight I thought he had it right. So, the next morning we assembled in the courtroom and the mayor stepped forward and said, if the court please, I will introduce now the charter, and as shown on this chart here of the party, we said number one deputy was Mr. Hess, number two was Goering. You should have seen Goering. He got light in the face. He shook his hand. He waived pieces of paper and I said we have to do something. I sent a piece of paper up to the good mayor and said Major would you please correct yourself and ask the person on the bench to listen to you, you made a mistake. He stopped and looked down and he said oh, if the court will permit me, number one deputy was Goering. You should have seen Goering. He was pleased as pie, and that was only a few weeks before he committed suicide. But if he went down, he went down with flying colors. Another thing which I remember which was important I think. At one point, when we showed the film, the death mills, which is documentary we found showing some of the concentration camps and showing some of the scenes from the Ghetto in Warsaw, we darkened the courtroom and had only lights shining on the faces of the 22 defendants. And I had opportunity to study the faces while that film was shown and all that brutality and it was amazing how they fell apart. Goering never looked at it. Neither did Hess. Schott who maintained all through the trial that he had nothing to do with the atrocities, turned his back to the screen and crossed his arms in front of him to indicate that he had been an absentee during the Nazi period. Franz, the butcher of Poland broke into tears. So, did Salkin, who was the labor czar. The only person who looked at the screen with obvious glee and pleasure was Streicher who was the so called gall leader in Bavaria, Franconia, and who had been the editor and publisher of this filthy

rag the Stormer, Storm Trooper you might call it. This was his show. He felt that he was vindicated completely by that picture. He also was the one, he was sentenced to death who allegedly, I wasn't there, shortly before his execution said to the executioner now you have your poem after all. He knew his Jewish calendar obviously. Now, those are scenes from Nuremberg. I do remember many others that may be worth quoting, but the trial itself was conducted by a bench which was divided in four parts, two American judges, two Soviet judges, two French judges and two Russian judges. They were not in agreement all of the time. That was obvious, but still the proceedings were conducted with utter dignity and decorum and I'll never forget the opening statement of the presiding judge, Judge Lawrence from Great Britain that this was a trial to be conducted without fear or favor. And it was. We had a galaxy of lawyers, SS prosecutors, as well as defendants and judges of course. The judgment was to many disappointing although some of them the guilty one including the military, top military were sentenced to death. I carried away from Nuremberg the conviction that I had attended an event that would go down in history as one of the probably most remarkable demonstrations of international justice, and I still feel that same way about it. Although I will admit that the major purposes of Nuremberg to protect peace and to ban genocide and anti-semitism have not yet been met and probably will not for some time to come.

Q: Can we digress for a second and go back to your role as to exactly you did for preparation of this trial and who you interacted with?

A: Well, I interrogated quite a few of the defendants and also as I mentioned before wrote these pretrial briefs in which I packed all the evidence we had at the time on the felonies of the party leaders, the so called leadership core, the SS, the SA also many of these things came to light after the trial including the one document as I mentioned. I was chief of research. That was my title in Nuremberg. I had a staff of a dozen people, most of them members of the Office of Strategic Services, including such upstanding lawyers as John Herz, who was part of it, and was a professor in New York, later. And we just collected the evidence and some of the evidence that came to us in the most peculiar ways I remember that one day a reporter from the New York times, came in my office and said I understand you're responsible here for collection of evidence. I was in Berlin. I went to the Chancellory, Hitler's Chancellory which was a heap of rubble of course in those days. I looked around and there were a lot of papers and I picked some up. I don't read German. I have no idea what I picked up. I'd like you to take a look at it, and he handed me a piece of paper that was slightly torn and singed of course, but low and behold there was the order from the SA party judge for the so called crystal night to the SA: You know it was long denied that that was any organized effort. It was always as the _____ used to call it, the boiling soul of the people who did it, but far from it. There was the order, black and white for the SA to get busy and set the torch in the synagogues and homes and shops of Jews.

Q: Can you tell us whose interviews you participated in?

A: Well, one I remember quite distinctly was _____ who was the head of the labor farm and he was a sad sap by the time they got to him, he was obviously ill. His eyes were tearing, his nose was flooding liberally, and I presented him with the chart of the party and said now you were the leader of the organization, tell me whether this is correct the way we put it together, and Lyle looked at it and he said well yes it is correct. It is correct, but that doesn't in any way reflect the reality. This was a dynamic organization and you cannot put it into boxes straight lines and vertical lines and what not. He then began to take my fountain pen to draw weird circles within circles and said this is the dynamism, unless you catch it you can't catch us. Two days later he was dead. He obviously had committed suicide. That was one example. Then there was a real red neck I got this SS leader from the eastern front, a fellow by the name of _____, and I confronted him with some of the atrocities that were committed by the SS in southern Russia and he looked at it and looked at it and said I don't understand how can you people know these things, you must have a terrific staff. I don't know whether he tried to find out in order to get a favorable consideration or not, but he was one of the worst butchers. And then the other one, I will remember and never forget was a fellow by the name of _____. He was -- he referred to himself as the butcher of Warsaw. He was an SS man, and he said I want to be confronted with some of the generals. We got him together with General _____, the tank general and a general by the name of _____. He said to us, I know what we did in Russia, but he said, but I'll be darned if I take the blame all by myself. We generals here we are just as guilty. They participated, they had the regular army and they worked with us in some of the ammunition of the minorities in southern Russia: _____ absolutely denied it. I have never known, but I don't believe it. _____ went to the collapse, and I have it black and white. It's in the archives, and said in German _____, have we tried in Germany and knew it. I don't think the children in Germany knew much was going on in the eastern front although they may have heard rumors to the effect, but _____ was sentenced to prison. He didn't stay very long. He was liberated, was put back again, and died eventually. So, those are some of the vignettes from Nuremberg. There were many more. I could go on forever telling you stories. I would like to perhaps finish by saying this. The punishment of the guilty was of course one of the post war targets and I had the satisfaction of being part of that, but I always felt that this was not enough. I remembered the days of Weimer, where a fledgling democracy was trying to come to the fore, and found very little sympathy outside Germany. The unbelievable reparation which were astronomical and which were never paid as a result of it, prevented not only the flourishing of the democracy but increased of course the strengths of the reactionary forces which eventually gave birth to the Nazis. The Weimer republic not a very experienced democracy and not very strong, collapsed. And my feeling, the feeling of some of our friends was that this must not happen a second time, and that after World War II as against World War I we would have a duty to encourage and force the democratic elements in Germany if anyone could be found. They could be found. We found people like Audenaur. We found people like the mayor of Berlin, _____, and many, many others whom I got to meet after the war. And we decided that in order to help them, we not only had to sanitize Germany economically, it

was the Marshall plan, but we had to do something also for the education of the new generation. And out of this came the so-called re-education program, which was at the time was a multi million dollar program. Today you would have to put the equivalent of billions for the kind of help that we had at our disposal. I was appointed in the State Department, Director of this program. We decided that one of the most important things to do was to get some of the young Germans, students, teachers, high school students even to come over to the States and have them stay here for a while to get to know what democracy looked like seeing not only from the federal but from the local level, and we recreated a so-called leadership program where practically all the leading members in politics, in the law, in the professions were invited to come to the States, including future presidents and chancellors of Germany. And in order to give them a chance to observe what they found here and if possible to apply it on their return to Germany. This was a program, I remember sitting here one night, at Pennsylvania Avenue, in offices and decided what this program should be like. The total exchange program of the United States in those days was a few hundred and we are mostly Chinese students for some reason, I don't remember what it was. I said now we have to do much more here. I turned to the staff and I said we've never done it before, what would you think of a figure of 2,000. And of all people, my budget man spoke up and said 2,000, why not 3,000? Why not 3,500? I said do you think we can do it? He said I have no idea: We should try, and we did. We did within a short span of years about 13,000 people involved in this exchange program. Most of them came from Germany to the States and experts and teachers and political advisors went to Germany. Then later we extended it to other European countries. We paid for it, and it's still going, although most of it today is on a private basis. But this exchange program really must be given for quite a bit of credit for what really happened in terms of political reform in Germany on the federal, state and local level. That is the sort of thing we failed to do in the 20s. And I felt very strongly, well I wasn't the only one, this mistake had to be corrected after World War II. It must not be permitted again. And we found people like -- well not General Clay. General Clay in the beginning had doubts. General Clay felt that he had so much money available and that had to be spent for economic purposes. He kept saying you cannot teach democracy on an empty stomach. We had to agree with him, but no need to do one thing without the other. Well, he had concerns that German students coming to the United States would be exposed to a lot of unpleasant personal experiences. It turned out to be totally wrong. We hardly ever had a single unpleasant experience among all these thousands of people who came over here, and we have proved to show it. These returning exchanges were responsible for a number of very important reforms in Germany. For instance, a group of parliamentary deputies, German _____, came to Washington and they said we have a terrible time because we are having what they call the chancellor democracy. The chancellor can legislate whatever he wants to and we really have no resources in any form or fashion to compete with it. We need to. So, we sent him to what then was a legislative Library of Congress. Legislative Reference Service of Congress and he came back he said that's just what we have to have. A staff organization where we can prepare our own legislation and where we don't have to take everything that the administration sends to us on our hill and they created it. And they created as a result of it a balance

between the German chancellorship and the German parliament. That was one thing. Another thing is they were preparing a new law for the military and we invited the whole committee which was preparing this law to come to the States to make it show two things. First of all, the problem of civilian control over the military and how we protected the rights of the individual soldier against any intervention from the top. They came. We took them all over the country. We opened the resources for him. We went back and made a very good law which is still in existence so those were some of the things that we tried to do with our so called re-education program. Incidentally let me say I never liked much the term re-education. It was really more to soften the American taxpayer than to appease the Germans and we later renamed it re-orientation which was not only appreciated but highly praised program and the German Parliament passed a resolution thanking us for what we did there.

Q: Can I ask you your comparison between the trial that you participated in and the subsequent trials?

A: Well, the subsequent trials really fell apart. If you want to see the documents as I read Telford Taylor's book and I was invited to go back as deputy to Telford Taylor for the second trial and I didn't do so. I was so advised in fact by my old boss Bill Donovan of _____, and it turned out that some of the trials were good and some of it is documented among other things in this marvelous picture I've seen three or four times, Judgment in Nuremberg, with Spencer Tracy and Lancaster which more or less gave you the flavor and philosophy of what really was I suppose the purpose of these trials. But in many cases they just collapsed. In some cases, the Germans proved to be tougher than we. For instance, the court in Nuremberg acquitted Schott, which I thought was a major mistake at the time, but the Germans put him in jail afterwards. So, there were some trials that worked out right, but on the whole what came afterwards ended very often in acquittals and in minor penalties and never reached the level of the _____.

Q: Could you describe the structure of the American prosecution team?

A: Well, the American prosecution, which I thought was a very good one, was headed by Justice Jackson. He was the chief prosecutor and he made a magnificent opening statement at the time. His deputy was General William Donovan. Old Bill Donovan of the fighting 69s of World War I, and then the rest of the group was composed of lawyers from the Judge Advocate Office of members of the OSS like myself, of Navy officers, Army officers, most of them with the exceptions of the OSS members, were in uniform. I wore a uniform but more for ornamental purposes. I was what they called a major at the time, I believe. But they were a military tribunal after all. You saw the defense of course was not in uniform and the bench wasn't except I believe the Russian judges were in uniform. Not the Americans, and not the French, certainly not the British.

Q: In preparation of these trials did you visit any of the concentration camps?

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A: Not in preparation, but while I was in Nuremberg, I took time off to go to Dachau concentration camp, which was only a few miles down from Nuremberg. I went there. We had a guided tour by I think one of the former inmates. We went through the famous gate, "Labor Makes You Free" or something like it. We went there. They showed us some of the ovens. In one of them I still detected some bones. They showed us the courtyard where the prisoners were torn apart by dogs and they showed us the barracks. That was after all a few months after the so-called liberation. That was an experience that no one can forget. I know that Eisenhower went there too at the time, well a few months earlier. Yes, I saw that, but I never saw the concentration camps in the east.

Q: Did you interview any of the survivors?

A: Oh, many of them, yes. Some of them were friends who suddenly emerged in Nuremberg. One was quite well known, Norbert Wllheim, who is one of the key figures now in the Holocaust program. He was in Dachau. His son and his former wife were gassed. He survived and he went free, escaped, and got back to West Germany and is now in the States and I see him infrequently. He lives in New York. I see many others too, and their stories are invariably the same. There are no six million lies, believe me. Well, that's more or less. I went eventually into the diplomatic service because I thought the two things I wanted to do for in German affairs were punishment of the guilty and the resurrection of the democrats. I had done as much as I thought I could do and I went to Diplomatic Service and I was acting ambassador in Switzerland to _____ and eventually concluded my diplomatic career working for the environment. I was the first special assistant in the State Department for Environmental Affairs.

Q: Is there any final comment that you'd like to make concerning your experience.

A: Well, I have made all the comments I wanted to make. A manuscript which hasn't been published yet in which I recounted for them my time from my childhood in Imperial Germany, in the Weimer Republic, in the Third Reich, to the war and the post war period and I believe that I don't claim any special credits for anything I've done but in a form, but in a way at least in it's first part, my life was the life of a quintessential German Jew who reaped all the benefits Germany had to offer in the early times and also witness and was victimized by the horrific collapse of all values we cherish under Hitler. I've no regrets that I saw it. We were typical as I said in the beginning, German Jewish middle class frapling, and not only we but going back to my grandparents. My grandfather on my mother's side was a _____ who fought twice for his king against Denmark and Austria and was in fact imprisoned and returned, triumphantly, I suppose to his little town in Rastrailia where he became the king of all marksman. He was a very good marksman, and they had an annual fair there and he never failed to get the crown. He was as German and Jewish as they come. So was the whole family, all of them stuck to their loyalties and to their convictions throughout World War I and World War II and thereafter. All of them of that generation are now gone.

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Conclusion of Interview